

4 Ladue Crest Lane
St. Louis County 17, Missouri
February 21, 1957

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
College of Agriculture
The University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Thank you very much for your letter and your reprints. I don't know exactly how to begin to answer your questions concerning my choice of a major field of interest. The fact is that my exposure to the field of microbial genetics has been entirely through general genetics and evolution courses, seminars, and some reading of the literature. I have never had a formal course in microbial genetics and have had no laboratory experience with the subject.

However, my interest in genetics is well crystallized. I think I have had rather a broad exposure to the field through the genetics and cytology courses I have taken, the genetics seminars in which I have participated, and the independent work in population genetics which I have done. Our department, as you perhaps know, is more concerned with the study of fly populations and parthenogenesis than with the mechanisms of gene action, and it is in these aspects of genetics that I have had the most experience.

But the questions of the nature of the gene and the nature of gene action seem to me to be much more interesting and ambitious than those asked by population geneticists, and my slight exposure to the field of microbial genetics, which is so much better suited to deal with such problems than is the study of flies, has made me completely dissatisfied with the more superficial questions of genetics. I have grown much more interested in the intimate details.

So my interest in the field of microbial genetics stems, for the most part, not from a specific knowledge of the field, but rather from a fascination with the questions with which it is suited to deal. I hope this is a satisfactory answer to your questions; it is terribly hard to be very objective where questions of interest are concerned.

Thank you once again for your letter and reprints.

Sincerely yours,
Millard Susman